

DEVADASI PRACTICE AND STATUS OF DEVADASIS IN INDIA – AN ANALYSIS

Abstract

Devadasi, which is Sanskrit for "Servants of God or Goddesses," was a prevalent practice in ancient India. The devadasi system dates back a very long time. This phrase can be broadly translated as "women serving God." Although there are changes in nomenclature and typology, this system is not specific to any one geographical area. In some southern Indian regions, parents vow their daughter to marry a deity or a temple. This practice is known as the devadasi system. The girl must become a prostitute for members of the upper caste community as part of the marriage, which typically takes place before the girl enters puberty. These girls are referred to as Devadasi or Jogini. Real marriage is prohibited between them.

Keywords: Jogini, Culture, Goddess, Dasi, Deity, Caste, Puberty.

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I. INTRODUCTION

In the Devadasi method, which is mostly practiced in southern India, parents commit their daughter to marriage to a goddess or a temple. The girl must become a prostitute for members of the upper caste community as part of the marriage, which typically takes place before the girl enters puberty. These girls are referred to as Devadasi or Jogini. Real marriage is prohibited between them.

Girls are offered as votive gifts to the gods at Hindu temples as part of the Indian tradition known as Devadasi. The dedication usually takes place before the girl reaches puberty and necessitates that she opens up her body to the community's men and women. According to conventional wisdom, these women are "serving" society as "ordained" by the goddess. The Devadasis are prostitutes in God's court, to put it another way. A devadasi cannot be wedded to one specific man because of her sacred status and connection to the deity, as in the traditional view of marriage, women are moveable property given to husbands. She belongs to a divinity that graciously grants the community access to her as a property. The proverb "a Devadasi is servant of God but wife of the whole town" is a good way to sum up this idea.

Most Devadasis are young girls who have been donated to the temple by their parents. There, they are instructed in holy dances and rituals honouring the temple's deity. Devadasi, which literally translates to "God's female servant" (Dasi), refers to young, prepubescent females who have been "married off" or "given away" in matrimony to God or a specific temple god. Due of their marriages to the temple God, these females are not permitted to get married. She was required to provide services for the priests, temple patrons, zamindars, and other wealthy and powerful men in the town and hamlet. The 'service' rendered to these persons is equated to God's service. The Devadasi is committed to serving the temple deity during her entire life.

The inscriptions found in temples in India may be able to trace the beginning of Devadasi. Inscriptions from around 1230–1240 CE, during the reign of Raja Raja III, changed the meaning of the word "Emperumandiyar," which had previously been used to refer to Vaishnavas, to dancing girls who were associated with Vishnu temples. They are referred to as "Devadasis" in Maharashtra and Karnataka, which means female servants of God.

As an example, in Karnataka, it is known as Devadasi, Rajadasi, AlankaraDasi, Rudradasi, Sule, Devasule, Jogathi, Basavi, and Nithyasumangali. Devaradhiyar, Nithyasumangali, Chennaveedu, Kannigeyar, Nithyakalyani, Rudra Dasi, and Manikattar are in Tamil Nadu. BhogamBasavi, Sani, Devali, and Kalavanthala are in Andhra Pradesh. Maharis from Orissa, Dhuki from Nepal, and Bhavin and Kulavanthin from Madhya Pradesh.

One of the difficult issues brought on by the social environment in which men are in charge and women are subservient is Devadasi. The term "Devadasi" is used to refer to prostitutes who work in temples or "handmaidens of God (or Goddess)".

States like West Bengal, Tamil Nadu, Maharashtra, Uttar Pradesh, Rajasthan, Gujarat, Orissa, Karnataka, and Andhra Pradesh have a strong Devadasi tradition. These are referred to by different names in various regions of the nation, including "Devadasi" (female),

"Jogata" (eunuchs, men who dress like women and perform prostitution) dedicated to Goddess Renuka or Yallamma in south Maharashtra and north Karnataka, "Potraj" (male) dedicated to Goddess Laxmi throughout Maharashtra, "Murali" (female), and "Vaghya" (male).

'Sule', 'Devara', 'Diyani', 'Guappa', 'NirwanHijara', 'Devdas', 'Dev' in Maharashtra, 'Sanis', 'Kurampus', 'Bogmus', 'Vallangai', 'Idngai' in Tamil Nadu, Kerala, and also some other regions of India. The capital cities of M.P., U.P., and Maharashtra, such as Bombay, Agra, Delhi, Lucknow, Calcutta, Pathana, and Kanpur, are the main locations of "Hijara." In truth, the custom is a significant source of fresh body parts for the country's commercial sex industry.

1. Status of Devadasi: The fact that the Devadasis could never become widowed was one of their greatest benefits. Being widowed can result in losing everything, hence this gave them a higher position than the majority of other women. This could be one of the explanations for why the Devadasi were thought to have higher social status than the majority of other women. They were occasionally viewed as the progression of the female Brahmin. It might be claimed that the Devadasi took over the women's role of the ceremonial performances as women were no longer permitted to serve as priests. Devadasis were once only recognized as the wives of the Gods or as those who had been wed to temples. They engaged in rites related to the temple and its dances by performing sacred dances, singing, and playing instruments. They had significantly increased in popularity and were attracting a lot of attention by the Chola Period, which lasted from 850 to 1300 CE. Many people now think that their position as sexual beings has been taken advantage of.

Temple girls received enough resources to support themselves. Along with providing annual wages, kings, chiefs, and wealthy followers arranged things by giving villages, lands, money, houses, sheep, and other things. Respect was accorded to the Sanis, and their singing and dance had the power to seduce regular people and compel them to follow them as devout followers. Some of them had the potential to become affluent and gave lavish donations to temples. However, due to historical factors, serious deterioration has gradually reduced this profession from its lofty perch of holiness to dust.

2. Features of Devadasis: Male and female 'Devadasi', 'Jogata', or 'Jogappa' can be distinguished by a certain characteristic. In the regions of Karnataka and Maharashtra state, a female Devadasi of Yellamma Goddess can be recognized by the following characteristics.

- **Jat (a thickened bunch of hair):** A girl or woman who develops a 'Jat' in her hair must unavoidably become a Devadasi in the superstitious environment of the community. Unkempt hair and dirty habits give rise to the 'Jat', which is perceived as a call from the Goddess to become a Devadasi. Other Devadasis in the hamlet terrorize the girl's parents by warning them that if the girl is not offered in marriage to the Goddess, the Goddess will curse their entire family and destroy them.

The 'Jat' is intentionally grown into a thick wad of all the hair on the head after becoming Devadasi and is then proudly waved around. From the perspective of

personal hygiene, this gummy, rotten, filthy, and muddy bundle of hair is teeming with lice and bacteria, causing skin conditions and mental anguish. Those men must have truly depraved minds if they still want to have sex with the damned woman.

- **Darshan (a Neckless of White and Red Glass beads):** A 'Darshan' is worn around the neck by a self-declared Devadasi. This makes her available for sex known, and the Devadasi cult will prevent police or courts from granting women who have been raped justice.
- **Paradi(a Small Hand-held Bamboo Basket):** This serves as a begging dish for Devadasi. The Paradi has the metal statues of Goddess Yellamma as well as a tiny linen pouch with two compartments, one containing red Kumkum and another with yellow turmeric powder. She accepts alms in the form of cash, pounded rice, or the available grain and generously dusts the donor's forehead with turmeric powder.
- **'Jag' (Large Bamboo Basket of Yellamma Goddess Idols carried on Head):** This basket is also a begging receptacle and contains one giant idol of Yellamma in addition to seven or more tiny metal idols of various Gods and a driven cobra head. This basket holds the alms that have been received.
- **Suti-Choundak or Chowdki(a Chord Musical Instrument):** Beginning carries it beneath her left auricle and beats the rhythm with her right hand fingers while singing a devotional song worshipping the Goddess.
- **Jogwa or Joga(Begging):** A Devadasi's traditional right is called jogawa. She could solely rely on begging to support herself in accordance with the oath she made to the Goddess. When she gets to the door of the person who will be giving alms, she yells "AkkandiJogwa," which means "constant begging," or "YekkayyaJogayya."

Only the Devadasi and no other beggars are linked with the shout. A housewife Devadasi would only beg from at least five houses on Tuesday and Friday, the days designated for the Goddess, as opposed to an unattached Devadasi who might beg all during the week. The Devadasis offer worship on behalf of the deity's followers and receive gifts from them.

- **Bhandara(Turmeric Powder):** The turmeric powder is also known as "bhandara" in the Devadasi cult. Murali massages the almsgiver's forehead with Devadasi.
- **Observances:** Devadasis typically mark the days of the Goddess by begging on Tuesdays and Fridays. On these days, some of them also fast.
- **Possessed:** On specific days and situations, certain female Devadasis put on a display of begging while they are possessed. They will predict future occurrences involving a person while in a trance. Those who practice superstition regard these as statements made by the Goddess herself.

3. Distinguishing Features of Male Jogata: A "Jogata" or "GanduJogappa" has all the defining characteristics that are present in a "Devadasi," as well as some additional characteristics that are unique to them. The following is a description of them:

- **Use of Sari:** At the time of his initiation, a male who wishes to become a "Jogata" or "GanduJogappa" is required to don a sari, which he wears for the rest of his life.
- **Feminine Gesture:** A Jogata overdoes his actions and facial expressions in an attempt to act like a successful woman. Additionally, he acts as though he is attracted to males while actually being drawn to them. In any event, he certainly cuts a pitiful figure with his sari and fake felinity.
- **Liberal use of Cosmetics:** Jogatas or GanduJogappa frequently use various types of skin cream to their hands and feet to soften the skin and cover up their facial hair and shaving indentations.
- **Menstruation:** A few Jogatas believe they also experience menstruation, despite the fact that this is anatomically impossible, due to their highly developed feminine psyche.
- **Change in Name:** Many Jogatas alter their original male names and only acknowledge female names that they have adopted. The majority of Devadasi children don't know who their father is, therefore they use their mother's name to identify themselves.

4. Devadasi System in other Cultures: The practice of Devadasi is not exclusive to Indian culture. There are several similarities across numerous other cultures. The existence of comparable institutions in other parts of the world is unquestionably supported by terms like Hierodouloi of Ancient Babylonia, "Concubines of Zeus" (Amman) of Egypt, "Lepodovroi" of Corinth in Greece, "Kosio" of the Slave Coast of Africa, "Geishas" of Japan, "a-nan" of Cambodia, "Vestal Virgins" of Ancient Rome, etc.

II. CONCLUSION

Devadasi, a woman who devotes her life to serving the patron deity of the revered temples in Eastern and Southern India. The majority of the temples used the Devadasi system. DEV (GOD), Dasi (slave), refers to unions between gods and goddesses and lifelong devotion to their worship and rituals. Devadasis have been around since the time of the Ancient Vedas, and in addition to helping with temple rites, they also sang and danced to worship the gods. Family donated their younger female child to the temple for this religious practice. Devadasi had a high social status and was referred to as a divine girl. They were utilized as sex slaves for upper caste and class individuals as the system altered over time. The majority of girls from low caste and tribal groups are coerced into this practice under the guise of religion, while some do it because their ancestors were Devadasis in the past.

Slowly, the women who performed such services began to be seen as members of a distinct and different social class. Some of them devoted their entire lives to serving the masters who cared for them. They gradually developed their skills in dancing and other fine

arts to the point where providing music and dance as part of worship to the Gods was included in temple rituals. This practice of presenting oneself as a devotee to God and to one's own masters in daily life was not restricted to any one area or nation but rather took on an international scope. In various parts of the world, this system was popular from the earliest times in history.

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